

VZCZCXRO3698
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHKL #0266/01 0991237
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 091237Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2579
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KUALA LUMPUR 000266

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MTS AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: NAJIB UNVEILS CABINET, PLACES LOYALISTS IN KEY
POSITIONS

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 253 -- NAJIB SWORN IN AS PRIME
MINISTER

Classified By: Political Counselor Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 b and
d.

Summary

11. (SBU) Prime Minister Najib Razak publicly announced his cabinet on April 9, placing his loyalists in key positions and giving the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO) party control of 15 out of 24 ministries. Najib appointed Muhyiddin Yassin as Deputy Prime Minister, reflecting his number two position in UMNO, but gave him the Education portfolio, rather than a more powerful ministry. Only four out of 28 cabinet members are truly new entries; all others either held minister or deputy minister rank under former PM Abdullah. Despite rumors of a streamlined cabinet with some outside technocrats, the number of ministries fell by only two and no outsiders took ministerial roles. The East Malaysian state of Sabah strengthened its representation in the cabinet with more important portfolios and one additional position in the person of new Foreign Minister Anifah Aman. UMNO's non-Malay partners in the National Front (BN) coalition received status quo allocations. Notably, former PM Abdullah's son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin was shut out, while former PM Mahathir's son became a deputy minister for international trade. This cable provides a quick snapshot of the cabinet members. Subsequent reporting will provide more analysis.

12. (C) Comment: After much hype regarding a reform cabinet, Najib has not put together a dramatically new team, but he has reshuffled the deck to put his key supporters in the most critical positions of power, including Finance (Najib himself), Home Affairs (Najib's cousin Hishammuddin) and Defense (Najib loyalist Zahid Hamidi). He has created a cabinet that should be responsive and loyal to him, and prepared to push Najib's agenda. Muhyiddin, both ally and potential rival, does not have a core power portfolio, which should increase Najib's comfort level. Sabah has been well taken care of, but the otherwise status quo treatment for ethnic minorities will not strengthen the appeal of BN's component parties. In important areas such as foreign affairs and finance, he has placed relative political lightweights, which could make the Prime Minister's office's role far more influential in formulating policies than under Abdullah Badawi. The removal of Rais Yatim as Foreign Minister and the likelihood of more active involvement by the PM's office in foreign affairs should allow for more positive opportunities for U.S. diplomatic engagement. End Summary and Comment.

Deputy Prime Minister (and Education)

¶3. (SBU) Najib officially appointed Muhyiddin Yassin as his Deputy Prime Minister, keeping with the tradition that the UMNO Deputy President serves in this post. Muhyiddin, the previous Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI), is also the new Minister of Education. The Education Ministry is not considered as prestigious as MITI, but is still considered moderately important and commands the largest budget of all the ministries. Traditionally, the Deputy Prime Minister has held more politically powerful posts, such as Defense, Home Affairs or Finance; this is not the case with Muhyiddin.

Prime Minister's Department

¶4. (SBU) Najib appointed the following Ministers to the Prime Minister's Department: Koh Tsu Koon, President of Gerakan, who will be in charge of National Unity; Mohamed Nazri Aziz, an incumbent Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, who is retaining his parliamentary affairs portfolio; retired Brigadier General Datuk Jamil Khir Baharum, who was the head of the religious corps in the Armed Forces and will focus on religious affairs in the PM's office; and Nor Yaakob, who was previously the Finance Minister II and who will now be in charge of the Economic Planning Unit.

Finance

¶5. (SBU) PM Najib will retain the position of Minister of Finance I. Former Deputy Finance Minister and UMNO Supreme

KUALA LUMP 00000266 002 OF 004

Council member Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah is Finance Minister II, a promotion from his previous deputy minister slot.

Foreign Affairs

¶6. (C) Najib appointed Sabah warlord Anifah Aman as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, replacing Rais Yatim. Anifah's brother is Sabah Chief Minister Musa Aman. A lawyer by profession, Anifah was the Deputy Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities from 2004-2008, and turned down a deputy minister position offered by PM Abdullah last year. Outside of Sabah, Anifah is not a political heavyweight. He studied law in the UK, but otherwise he has no significant international experience that we are aware of. Post will forward a complete biography separately.

Defense

¶7. (SBU) UMNO Senior Vice President and Najib's loyalist Zahid Hamidi was named the new Defense Minister. Zahid was the political secretary to Najib for five years when Najib was the Defense Minister.

Home Affairs

¶8. (C) Former Education Minister and UMNO Vice President Hishammuddin Hussein (who is also Najib's cousin) was appointed as the new Home Minister, replacing Syed Hamid Albar. Hishammuddin was UMNO Youth Chief over a period of 5 years, ending last month. Hishammuddin is considered very loyal to Najib and also someone who aspires to the position of Prime Minister in the future (and when his time comes).

International Trade and Industry

¶9. (SBU) Mustafa Mohamed, former Minister of Agriculture and the UMNO Supreme Council member who received the highest number of votes in recent UMNO elections, was appointed as

the new Minister of International Trade and Industry, replacing Muhyiddin Yassin. One of his deputies is former PM Mahathir's son Mukhriz Mahathir.

Higher Education

¶10. (SBU) The leadership of the Ministry of Education remains unchanged, as Khalid Nordin was reappointed to the position.

Housing and Local Government

¶11. (SBU) Najib continued the tradition of naming a senior member of the MCA as the Minister of Housing and Local Government by appointing the party's Vice President Kong Cho Ha. Kong was the former deputy Minister of Finance.

Public Works

¶12. (SBU) Najib appointed UMNO Supreme Council member and former Minister of Energy, Water and Communications Shaziman Abu Mansor as the new Minister of Works.

Energy, Green Technology and Water

¶13. (SBU) This is a new Ministry in the Malaysian cabinet. Sarawak's Peter Chin Fah Kui was named the new Minister. Peter was previously Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, and is the organizing secretary of the BN-component party Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP).

Agriculture and Agro-based Industry

¶14. (SBU) Najib's former Minister of Cooperative and Entrepreneur Development and an UMNO warlord Noh Omar as the new Minister of Agriculture. Noh is a very popular UMNO grassroots leader from Selangor.

Transportation

¶15. (SBU) Najib retained MCA President Ong Tee Keat as the

KUALA LUMP 00000266 003 OF 004

Minister of Transportation. The MCA has traditionally been allocated this ministry.

Human Resources

¶16. (SBU) Najib retained MIC Secretary General Dr. S. Subramaniam as the Minister of Human resources. He is the only ethnic Indian in the Cabinet.

Women, Family and Community Development

¶17. (C) Shahrizat Abdul Jalil is the new Minister for Women, Family, and Community Development, a position she previously held from 2004-2008. She is also the UMNO Women's Chief. Shahrizat lost her parliamentary seat in 2008, but was appointed a senator by former PM Abdullah. Shahrizat proved a difficult interlocutor during her previous term as Women's Minister.

Information, Communication, Arts, and Culture

¶18. (SBU) Najib merged the Information Ministry and the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, naming previous Foreign Minister Rais Yatim as Minister. Rais served as the Minister of Information from 1984-1986, and as Minister of

Culture, Arts, and Heritage from 2004-2008.

Science, Technology, and Innovation

¶19. (SBU) Najib retained Dr. Maximus Ongkili as the Minister of Science, Technology, and Information. Maximus is also the Deputy President of the BN Component Sabah Unity Party (PBS).

Natural Resources and Environment

¶20. (SBU) Najib retained Douglas Unggah Embas as the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment. A native of Sarawak, he has been a Member of Parliament since 1986. He is a vice president of the BN-component party Sarawak Native Inheritance Party (PBB).

Rural and Regional Development

¶21. (SBU) Najib named one of his staunch loyalists, UMNO Vice President Shafie Apdal, as the Minister of Rural and Regional Development. Shafie is a Sabah UMNO leader who reportedly wanted this ministry, as it will allow for further development of impoverished Sabah.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs

¶22. (SBU) Former Youth and Sports Minister Ismail Sari Yaakob is the new Minister of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs.

Plantation Industries and Commodities

¶23. (SBU) Najib named Bernard Dompok as the new Minister for Plantation Industries and Commodities. Bernard is the President of BN component party United Pasok Momogon Kadazan (UPKO), and a former Minister in the Prime Minister's department.

Youth and Sports

¶24. (SBU) Shabery Cheek is the new Minister of Youth and Sports. Shabery was previously the Minister of Information and was recently elected to the UMNO Supreme Council. One of his deputies is the influential Razali Ibrahim, the Deputy UMNO Youth Chief. (Comment: It is noteworthy that Razali received a Deputy position, whereas the UMNO Youth Chief whom he works for, Khairy Jamaluddin, did not. Khairy is former PM Abdullah's son-in-law, and has been heavily criticized by former PM Mahathir and other elements within UMNO. End Comment.)

Health

¶25. (SBU) Najib retained Liow Tiong Lai as the Minister of

KUALA LUMP 00000266 004 OF 004

Health. The Healthy Ministry has traditionally been allocated to a high-ranking member of the MCA.

Tourism

¶26. (SBU) Dr. Ng Yen Yen is the new Minister of Tourism. Ng is the former Minister for Women, Family, and Community Development. She is also a Vice President in the MCA.

Federal Territories

¶27. (SBU) Najib named businessman and political newcomer Raja

Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin as the Minister of Federal
Territories. Raja is the President of the Bumiputra
Manufacturer's and Service Industry Association of Malaysia.
KEITH